**“Blessed Silence” by Mary Ann Smythe**

The man really loved his wife. If only she would stop talking. She never shut up.

Never said anything he wanted to hear. She began to talk non-stop about inanimate objects. Then she started to talk to the objects. Especially her miniatures!

She started building miniatures with a glass fronted wooden box filled with a diminutive hat shop. Tiny hats trimmed in minuscule feathers, flowers and bows. Little figures and hat stands. She didn't talk so much then. He held real conversations with her. Somewhere along the way, verbal diarrhea started. He couldn't remember when. Maybe when their last child went off to college. She said the house seemed so quiet.

Every room became cluttered with her words. The walls vibrated with syllables, unfinished sentences, partial words, disjointed phrases, thoughts that never made sense.

Her talking deteriorated into just words, as though read from a dictionary. In singsong cadence she shouted or whispered. Never a normal tone of voice. She saved that to ask a question or make a declarative statement.

Her shouting hurt his ears. The whispers made it seem as though a malevolent being occupied his home.

He couldn't stand it.

She started a miniature of their home in the Philadelphia suburbs. With shouts and whispers, she constructed the framework. The wiring included the same lighting and wall fixtures as their house. A miniature doorbell rang the same chimes as their own.

He listened as she constructed and filled the interior of the house with duplicates of their own furnishings.

Completing each room, she drew up a diminutive floor plan for the next. As she worked on the kitchen, a small doll joined the ivory appliances. It wore clothes that matched his wife's, its long auburn hair styled exactly like its creator. The doll duplicated her movements in the miniature house.

He hurried past this budding masterpiece after listening to his wife mumble and shout her way through a meal. A small voice replicated the exact words he fled. He listened in horror as the doll stood at the kitchen sink washing dishes, its mouth working in an endless stream of meaningless words!

A whisper insinuated its way into his consciousness. His wife, mouth moving in an endless litany of whispered words, climbed onto a chair in the kitchen to rehang a curtain. As she stretched to hang the rod she held in her hand, he watched in revulsion. The tiny doll did the same thing, whispers curling from her mouth to fill the minute kitchen.

A slight nudge from the tip of his finger and the doll, with a tiny high-pitched scream, plunged off the chair to land on the floor. The end of the curtain rod protruded from its throat.

A short explosive scream from the full-sized kitchen split the air, punctuated by a loud thud as a body hit the floor. Gurgling sounds replaced words as his wife tried and failed to draw air into her injured throat.

Blessed silence descended.

If only she had stopped talking.

**At the Autopsy by Ross Lesko**

“Victim’s blood is completely drained, apparently through two small puncture wounds in the neck,” said the coroner.

“Hey…you don’t suppose it’s, you know, the real deal?” asked his assistant.

“No, just some psycho.”

“You sure?”

They stared at each other for a moment, then burst out laughing – but stopped when the corpse laughed, too.

**Shift Work by Erica Schalow**

“You’re still here? Where’s Dr. Jones?”

The Emergency Room is busy. I’m pissed at my missing replacement.

“He’s late again,” I say.

“Hey, Doc! Face versus windshield – better come quick!”

Cursing to myself, I yell at the charge nurse: “Page Dr. Jones again!” As I intubate, I hear Jones’ pager – on the patient’s belt.

**One Year Later by Martha Phillips**

“Good morning, Eva.”

“Morning, Sheryl.”

“So how’s your garden doing?”

“Growing like a weed!”

They laughed.

“I’m sure it’s given you a lot of comfort since Henry disappeared,” said Sheryl kindly.

“Actually,” said Eva, “I often feel he never really left me at all.”

Her roses were unusually large that summer.